



# Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Wildland Fire Resiliency Fact Sheet

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District works year-round to reduce wildland fire severity and risk in our region by managing vegetation in the public open space preserves we care for with a focus on ecological health and wildland fire resiliency, in alignment with our mission and policies.

We continually work with fire agencies and surrounding communities to strengthen the prevention of, preparation for and response to wildland fires. In addition to ongoing annual activities, our **Wildland Fire Resiliency Program**, finalized in 2021, is proactively **expanding our environmentally sensitive vegetation management by approximately 600% over 10 years** to promote healthy, resilient, fire-adapted ecosystems to reduce wildland fire risk and facilitate the response of fire agencies.

## Ongoing Annual Activities

- **Maintain** hundreds of miles of fuel breaks, fire roads and evacuation routes.
- **Coordinate with local fire agencies** to annually prioritize resources and projects.
- **Maintain defensible space around Midpen structures.**
- **Prioritize flammable invasive plants for removal through our Integrated Pest Management Program.**
- **Provide annual wildland firefighter training for staff** who are first responders and assist fire agencies.
- **Install water pumpers** on ranger trucks during fire season.
- **Manage grassland fuel loads with conservation grazing** on approximately 6,500 acres on the San Mateo County Coast.
- **Enforce bans on high fire-risk activities in preserves:** smoking, campfires and firearms.
- **Communicate Red Flag Warnings** to the public.
- **Issue Defensible Space Permits** for neighbors.

## Wildland Fire Resiliency Program

Finalized in early 2021 after a public process, our program components are designed to prioritize potential treatment areas using best available science:

- **Vegetation management plan** focused on ecosystem resiliency and facilitation of fire response and evacuation.
- **Scientific monitoring plan** to inform continual adaptation of program.
- **Prefire plans with resource advisor maps** to assist fire agencies in their response.
- **Prescribed fire plan** to reintroduce prescribed fire to Midpen's land management toolbox. This element is currently undergoing further environmental analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act.



Brad Pennington.

Fire-trained staff protecting Midpen preserves from the CZU Lightning Complex Fire in 2020 by holding it at Old Haul Road.





Disced lines, Monte Bello Open Space Preserve.



Remote control mower, Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve.



Eucalyptus removal and restoration, Los Trancos Open Space Preserve by Leigh Ann Gessner.

## Vegetation Management Projects

Midpen implements a range of ecologically sensitive new projects and ongoing maintenance of existing projects that improve ecosystem health and reduce fuel loads, slow wildland fires and reduce their intensity.

### Project Types

**Shaded fuel breaks:** Low branches and woody understory vegetation are thinned out in forested areas to slow fires and keep them on the ground. Enough tree canopy is retained to maintain shade, reduce the potential for rapid regrowth of understory plants and minimize erosion.

**Fuel breaks:** An area often along existing roads and trails where vegetation is modified to reduce fire intensity, provide an operational tool for firefighters to create backfires and support safer passage for emergency responders and public evacuation routes.

**Disc and control lines:** Linear areas of one to 10 feet or more made by hand or with an agricultural disc or bulldozer to create an area of bare mineral soil without flammable vegetation to slow fires and provide firefighters a location to perform wildfire suppression activities.

**Landing zones:** Areas where wildland fire helicopters can land and take off safely with equipment, supplies, personnel and water.

**Defensible space:** A buffer created between a building and the wildland area that surrounds it to slow or stop the spread of fire and protect buildings and firefighters. There are three defensible space zones with different treatment requirements; within five feet, within 30 feet, and within 30 to 100 feet of buildings.

### Current and Recent Projects

In the first six months of 2021, Midpen staff completed 67 vegetation management projects. Highlights include:

**Sierra Azul Preserve:** 20 acres of new shaded fuel break in the Loma Prieta Road area.

**Fremont Older Preserve:** 13.6 acres of disc lines around the entire preserve.

**Pulgas Ridge Preserve:** 17 acres of new shaded fuel break along Hassler and Cordilleras Trails.

**Coal Creek Preserve:** 2.5 miles of new shaded fuel break along roads and trails in partnership with the California Conservation Corps partnership and supported by a \$232,358 Prop 68 grant. High priority project in Cal Fire's Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

**Los Trancos Preserve:** Removal of eucalyptus trees along a critical Page Mill Road evacuation route in partnership with City of Palo Alto and Santa Clara County FireSafe Council.

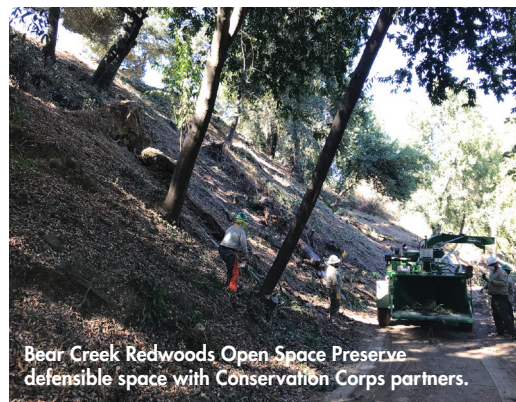
**Windy Hill Preserve:** Defensible space and eucalyptus tree removal in Sausal Pond area.

For a full list of Midpen's vegetation management projects, visit [openspace.org/fire](https://openspace.org/fire).



Disced line, Monte Bello Open Space Preserve.





Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve defensible space with Conservation Corps partners.



Annual wildland firefighting training for Midpen ranger and maintenance staff.



San Jose Conservation Corps shaded fuel break Hawthorns, Windy Hill Open Space Preserve

## Capacity Building: Grants, Staffing and Partnerships

Implementation of the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program will cost approximately \$36 million over the next decade. In addition to our ongoing partnerships with local fire agencies and FireSafe Councils, Midpen is building capacity by increasing staff and grant funding.

### Grant Funding

Since 2017, **\$2,498,358 in grant funding** has been awarded to Midpen for wildland fire-related projects. Staff continue actively seeking additional grants.

- **CAL Fire— Los Gatos Creek Watershed Collaborative Forest Health Grant \$1.59M** (of \$7.5M, 2021, with Santa Clara County FireSafe Council) 354 acres treated in Bear Creek Redwoods, Saratoga Gap, Sierra Azul and Long Ridge Preserves.
- **State Coastal Conservancy—Wildland Fire Resiliency Program** initial implementation **\$400,000** (2021).
- **California Conservation Corps Prop 68 Grant—Coal Creek Preserve Fuel Break Project \$232,358** (2020).
- **Santa Clara County FireSafe Council—Los Trancos Eucalyptus Removal \$276,000** (2017).



Buckeyes and trees, Monte Bello Open Space Preserve/Karl Gohl

### Staffing

New staff positions added in 2020-21 have increased capacity for wildland fire-related work.

- **Field Resource Specialist** is being hired to plan, schedule and lead fuel reduction activities, invasive species removal, and prescribed burns and leverage interagency partnerships and funding.
- **Ranger** increases capacity for fire monitoring, response and support.
- **Equipment Mechanic Operator** increases capacity for vegetation management.

### Partnerships

In addition to ongoing partnerships with local fire agencies, FireSafe Councils, towns and cities, new and expanded partnerships help build capacity for increased wildland fire work.

- **San Jose Conservation Corps Partnership** \$750,000 contract over four years (2021-2025) increases capacity for vegetation management projects.



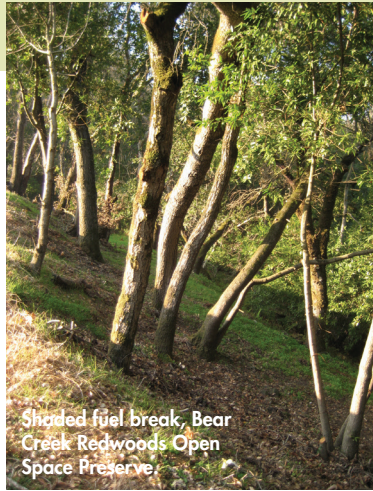
Thornewood Open Space Preserve.



# Legislative Efforts

Midpen works with local, state and national legislators to advocate for funding and policies that increase our region's ability to prepare for, prevent and respond to wildland fire. Recent efforts include:

- Incorporated Midpen's fire priorities into presentations to state and federal legislators and local elected officials.
- Took positions on 14 fire-related bills since 2018 in accordance with Midpen's board-adopted Legislative Program. Bills covered funding, defensible space, fire planning, prescribed fires, ecologically sensitive vegetation management, fire prevention, public education, forest management, utility responsibility, invasive species and job training.
- Actively advocated for the inclusion of Midpen-priority provisions related to ecologically sensitive vegetation management where legislative opportunities occur.
- Advocated at the state and regional levels to reduce Regional Housing Needs Allocations to unincorporated counties where most fire-prone areas exist.
- Advocated on proposed state Minimum Fire Safety Regulations.



Shaded fuel break, Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve



Ranger Truck Pumper Training.



Fuel break mowing near Page Mill Road.



Fire caused by a power line stopped by Midpen vegetation management work at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve.



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